GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:1225
ANSWERED ON:08.12.2004
TIES WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES
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Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether The present Government has initiated a drive to strengthen the ties with the neighbouring countries;

(b) if so, the measures taken so far towards this goal; and

(c) the details of the achievements made by the Government in this direction?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED)

(a) to (c) The details of our bilateral ties with the neighbouring countries are given below, country-wise:-

NEPAL

The Government accords high priority to our relations with Nepal. Several steps have been taken to further strengthen and broadbase our bilateral relations; these include sustained interaction at high level and frequent and periodic interaction between senior officials from India and Nepal. EAM`s first overseas visit after assumption of charge was to Nepal (June 2004). The visit of PM of Nepal to India (8-12 September 2004) provided an opportunity to discuss a wide range of issues of mutual interest including security-related issues, trade and economic issues and cooperation in the field of water resources. Four documents concluded during the visit include: Agreement in the field of Culture and Sports; MOU on cooperation in the field of Weather Forecasting; Agreement between Bureau of Indian Standards and Nepal Bureau of Standards; Agreement between Indian Oil Corporation and Nepal Oil Corporation for the construction of an oil pipeline between Raxaul (India) and Amlekhgunj (Nepal). Recently Minister of State for External Affairs met his counterpart in Nepal and also the Prime Minister of Nepal during his visit to Nepal (30th November-1st December 2004) when issues of mutual interest were discussed.

BHUTAN

The Government accords high priority to our relations with Bhutan. Several steps have been taken to further strengthen and broadbase our bilateral relations; these include, sustained interaction at high level and frequent and periodic interaction between senior officials from India and Bhutan.

High-level interactions with Bhutan included visits of Foreign Minister of Bhutan Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk to Delhi (July 2004), visit of EAM (October 12-13 2004) and MOS (RIS) to Bhutan (October 23-24 2004). The working visit of His Majesty the King of Bhutan to India from November 24 to 29, 2004, provided another opportunity to review the entire gamut of our bilateral cooperation, including issues relating to mutual security and economic cooperation, with special emphasis on the hydro-power sector. An MOU on Project Implementation Mechanism was signed in October 2004.

BANGLADESH

India`s relations with Bangladesh are cordial and wide-ranging. The two countries interact regularly at various levels. Bangladesh Prime Minsiter met our Prime Minister in Bangkok in July 2004; Bangladesh Foreign Minister has visited India twice in April and November 2004; Bangladesh Commerce Minister visited Delhi in November 2004.

The bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh is expanding rapidly and has crossed US$ 1 billion. Some Indian companies, including Tatas are exploring possibilities of investing in Bangladesh.

SRI LANKA

Attempts have been made to develop closer political understanding and building closer economic ties with Sri Lanka.

There have been frequent high-level visits. The Sri Lankan President, Prime Minster and Leader of Opposition have all visited India in the past six months. A Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement that will broaden and deepen the economic cooperation framework of the bilateral Free Trade Agreement is being negotiated. A Defence Cooperation Agreement is also being negotiated. An MoU on Bilateral Cooperation in fisheries is under negotiation.

MALDIVES

Our relations with Maldives are cordial and friendly. There have been regular high-level contacts.

India is assisting Maldives in collaborative projects to improve infrastructural facilities. It is cooperating with Maldives in areas of human resource development and public health care.

PAKISTAN

Government remains committed to establishment of peaceful, friendly and cooperative relations with Pakistan. Continuous efforts have been made to intensify the ongoing process of confidence building, dialogue, and cooperation with Pakistan. One round of the Composite Dialogue (February -September 2004) was completed successfully. Wide ranging proposals for confidence building, promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields and enhancing commercial and economic relations were made by India. Both sides have been able to identify areas of convergence and future cooperation. The process has been taken forward by high-level political contacts, including the meeting between Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Musharraf in New York on September 24, 2004; and regular interactions between External Affairs Minister Shri K. Natwar Singh and the Foreign Minister of Pakistan. The visit of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to New Delhi on November 23-24, 2004 in his capacity as the Chairperson of SAARC, also facilitated forward movement on the bilateral front. Government intends to continue with the dialogue process in an atmosphere free from terrorism and violence.

CHINA

Government attaches great importance to India-China relations, and remains committed to the process of strengthening and expanding relations and to further developing long-term constructive and cooperative partnership with China on the basis of the principles of Panchsheel, mutual respect and sensitivity to each other`s concerns and aspirations, and equality. Wide-ranging dialogue mechanisms have been institutionalized to sustain the process of qualitative improvement in the relationship. Frequent high-level exchanges have contributed to building of mutual trust and confidence. Prime Minister had a productive meeting with the Chinese Premier on the margins of the ASEAN Summit at Vientiane on November 30, 2004.

With the joint efforts of both sides, India-China cooperation has diversified across a wide range of areas and is growing, thus adding greater stability to our relationship. For example, our bilateral trade has shot up from around US$200 million in the early nineties to around US$7.6 billion in 2003 and is expected to touch US$12 billion this year. A Joint Study Group (JSG) is examining the areas of complementarities to further expand bilateral economic exchanges. At the same time, we have agreed to deal with our differences in a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable manner without allowing them to define the contours of our relationship. We have been successful in maintaining peace and tranquility in the India-China border areas. The Special Representatives on the Boundary Question are continuing their discussions to explore a political framework of the boundary settlement.

MYANMAR

The Government of India (GOI) has maintained high-level political contacts with the Government of Myanmar which culminated in the State Visit of the Head of State of Myanmar Senior General Than Shwe to India in October 2004. GOI has sought to strengthen economic and technological ties through developing cross-border infrastructural projects and is working with the Chambers of Commerce towards achieving the target of doubling bilateral trade to $1 billion by 2006. An Agreement in the field of Culture has been signed to facilitate people-to-people contacts.

The Government has obtained a commitment from the Myanmar Government not to allow insurgent activities against India from its territory. Under a Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation in the field of Non-Traditional Security Issues signed between the two countries on 25th October 2004, both sides have agreed to cooperate to prevent cross- border crimes, including drug trafficking and arms smuggling. Infrastructure projects in the field of roads, railways, energy and IT linking North-East India with Western Myanmar are underway and will contribute to development and prosperity of these regions. In this regard, a MoU on the Tamanthi Hydroelectric Power Project was signed in October 2004. A Joint Task Force Report on bilateral trade and investment has also been released in October 2004 and its recommendations are under examination. Both countries have also stepped up cooperation in regional fora such as the India-ASEAN Summit framework and BIMST-EC as well as on multilateral issues of concern. Myanmar has expressed support for India`s claim to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.